



# **SERVING THOSE WHO SERVE: EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR**

## **TUG HILL COMMISSION 2025 LOCAL GOV'T CONFERENCE**

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*Presented by:*

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## Stress Management



Manager's responsibility of promoting a positive work culture:

- Monitor staff conditions (physical and mental)
- Identify deviations in character
- Promote positive mental health
- Promote a safe work environment
- Inform staff of assistance programs (EAP, etc.)

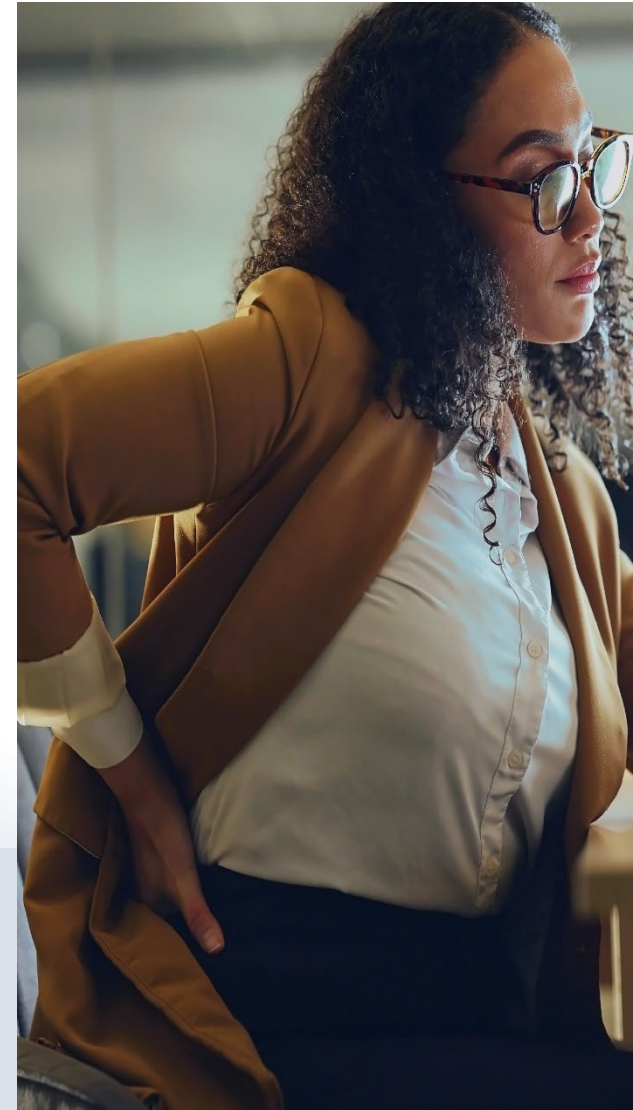
## What is Stress?

Define Stress - *the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker*

Anxiety and Mental Health

Traumatic Events

What is stress management – remember that stress at work is not always a negative thing



## Common Stressors in Municipal Jobs

Workplace stress can be created by the perception of having little control but lots of demands.

1. Dealing with the Public/Tax Payers
2. Disgruntled Co-Workers
3. Poor Morale
4. Demands/Timelines/Budgets
5. Underappreciated
6. Lack of Job Security
7. Personal Issues





## What is Stress?

### Acute Stress vs. Chronic Stress

Acute stress is a dramatic physiological and psychological reaction to a specific event.

- ❖ Presentation at work, concerns about upcoming situation/event, recent argument, running late

Chronic stress, however, is a consistent sense of feeling pressured and overwhelmed over a long period of time.

- ❖ Bad relationship, stressful job, toxic homelife, on-going health concerns, poor sleep habits





## Consequences of Unmanaged Stress

Impact of stress in the workplace:

- Limited productivity
- Increased absenteeism
- Unable to concentrate/focus on task at hand
  - Leads to increase injuries
  - Creates unsafe work conditions







## Consequences of Unmanaged Stress

Negative effects of chronic stress on health and job performance

Physical

Mental/Anxiety/Burnout

Health

Suicide

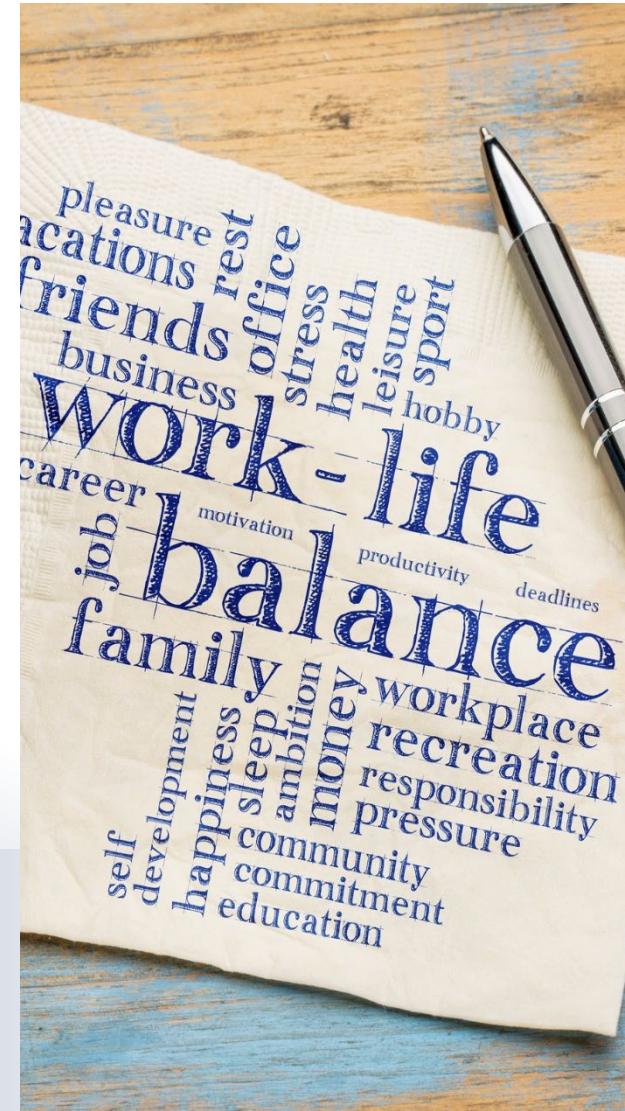
Substance Abuse Disorder





## Importance of Acknowledgement and Managing Stress

- Management of workplace stress contributes to employee well-being and benefits organizational success
  - *Positive Work Environment*
- A 2021 study found that people with physically active lifestyles have about a [60% lower chance](#) of developing anxiety symptoms.







## Workplace Policies and Support

- Identify your stressors. Write down what stresses you out during the workday and how you respond.
- Practice relaxation techniques.
- Set aside time for yourself.
- Step away from work.
- Maintain a regular exercise routine.
- Improve your sleeping habits.
- See a therapist.
- Adjust your approach.

## How to Recognize Stress

- Signs and symptoms of stress
  - Physical
  - Mental/Anxiety
  - Health
- Encourage open communication and awareness



# Workplace Policies and Support



Highlight supportive policies and practices

- EAP
- Time management techniques
- Work-Life Balance
- Relaxation and Mindfulness Techniques
- Healthy lifestyle choices
- Team building and social support



## Handling Conflict



- Effective conflict resolution
  - De-Escalation
  - Conflict Resolution
  - Corrective Discipline
- Promote a Positive Work Environment
  - Relatively enjoyable
  - Reasonably productive





## Personal Staff Development



- Opportunities for skill development and training
- Empower employees to enhance their abilities
- Recognition of employee efforts and accomplishments
- Positive impact on morale



# Common Psychiatric Conditions

- Generalized Anxiety
- Depression
- Panic Disorder
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- Substance Abuse
- Agoraphobia
- Eating Disorders





## Psychological First Aid



- Engage the affected person
- Ensure immediate and ongoing safety
- Stabilize, reassure, and contain
- Obtain information to select subsequent interventions
- Provide practical assistance to address immediate needs and concerns
- Connect with social supports
- Educate on stress reactions and coping
- Link with services that might be needed in the future



## Stress Management Resources

CDC - <https://www.cdc.gov/workplacehealthpromotion/tools-resources/workplace-health/stress.html>

OSHA - <https://www.osha.gov/workplace-stress>

American Institute of Stress – [www.stress.org](http://www.stress.org)

Center for Workplace Mental Health -  
<https://workplacementalhealth.org/mental-health-topics/workplace-stress>

Your municipal Employee Assistance Program (EAP)



# ASD and PTSD



## Acute Stress Disorder (ASD)

- A psychiatric diagnosis that may occur in patients within four weeks of a traumatic event. Features include anxiety, intense fear or helplessness, dissociative symptoms, reexperiencing the event, and avoidance behaviors.

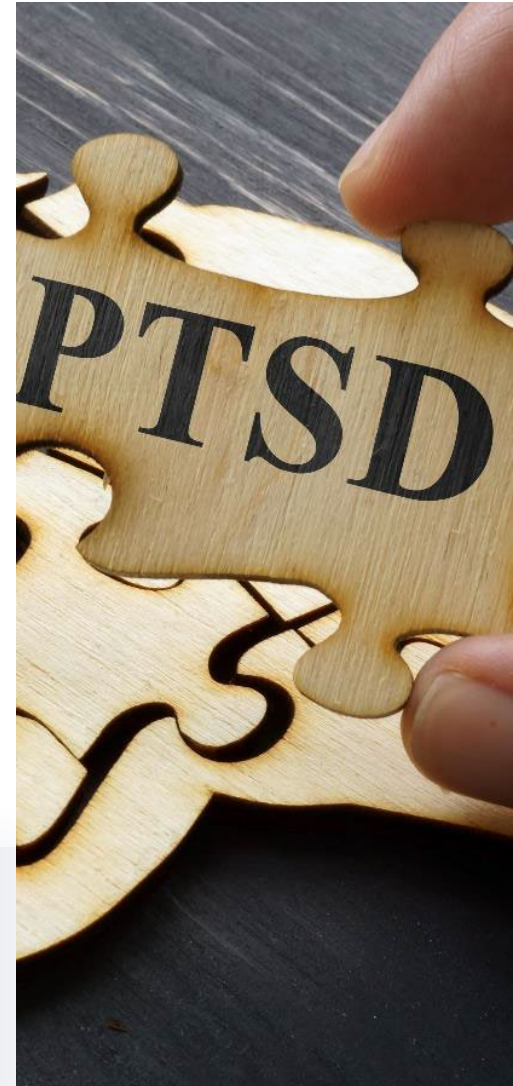
## Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

- A mental health condition that's triggered by a terrifying event — either experiencing it or witnessing it. Symptoms may include flashbacks, nightmares and severe anxiety, as well as uncontrollable thoughts about the event.



## PTSD – Historical Titles and Triggers

- *Shell Shocked*
- *Survivor Guilt*
- *Combat Fatigue*
- *Battle Fatigue*
- Serious Accidents
- Natural Disasters
- War/Combat
- Rape/Sexual Assault





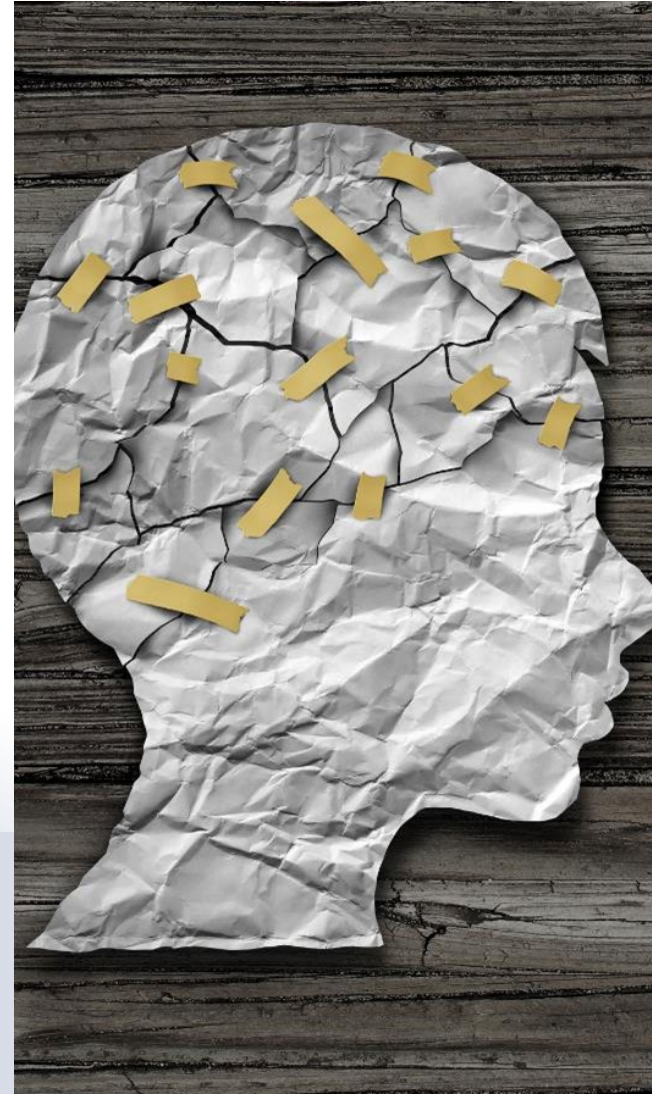


# Trends in Mental Injuries & PTSD

- PTSD affects 3.5% of U.S. adults every year.
- 1 in 11 people will now be diagnosed with PTSD in their lifetime.
- Women are twice as likely as men to have PTSD.
- A normal response to an abnormal event doesn't automatically transition into PTSD.

## Trends in Mental Injuries & PTSD

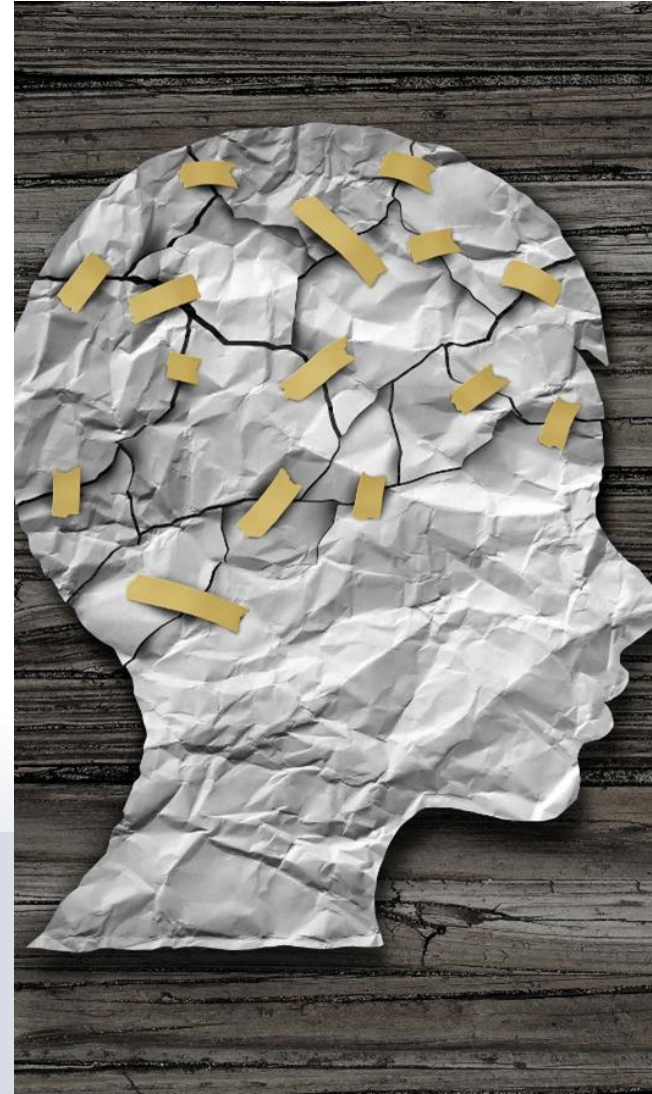
- **Symptoms of PTSD**
  - Intrusive Thoughts
  - Avoidance
  - Alterations in cognition and mood
  - Hypervigilance
  - Sleep Disturbance
  - Alterations in reactivity



## Trends in Mental Injuries & PTSD



- **Treatment**
  - Psychotherapy
  - Medication
  - Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
  - Virtual Reality





## PTSD & Workers Compensation



- First Responders suffer from PTSD at a rate 50% higher than the national average.
- At the height of the pandemic, health care workers and first responders accounted for nearly 75% of all workers compensation claims.
- Mental health-related injuries are specifically covered in some capacity by workers compensation in 34 states but coverage varies significantly.

<https://www.ncsl.org/labor-and-employment/mental-health-and-workers-compensation-snapshot>

## Physical/Mental

- Claims where mental disabilities exist following a physical injury.
- The physical injury itself may or may not be of overwhelming significance.





## Mental/Physical

- A psychological stimulus that causes a physical injury which continues even after the stimulus is removed.



## Mental/Mental

- The employee suffers no physical injury but due to a psychological trauma or event suffers from a mental disability.





# PTSD Legal Evolution

- Legal
  - NCCI monitored 64 bills addressing workers compensation for workplace-related mental injuries. This includes approximately 51 bills related to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
  - 7 States considered expansion of existing mental injury laws.

Tim Tucker, NCCI 2024 Regulatory and Legislative Trends, September 5, 2024, [https://www.ncci.com/Articles/Documents/II\\_Regulatory-Legislative-Trends2024.pdf](https://www.ncci.com/Articles/Documents/II_Regulatory-Legislative-Trends2024.pdf)



# Handling Lessons

- Identify the standard of proof.
- Is the standard objective or subjective?
- Is the application to a similar job class or all employment?
- Is there a readily identifiable work event or series of work events?
- Is there a break in the chain in causation?



# Standard of Proof

- Presumption.
  - Washington Proposal:
  - WAC 296-14-300:
    - (3) For certain firefighters and law enforcement officers, there is a **presumption that posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is an occupational disease** as provided by RCW 51.08.142 and 51.32.185.
    - (4) For public safety telecommunicators, PTSD may be considered an occupational disease as provided by RCW 51.08.142.





## New York – Stress Claim Case Study



- Injured worker, a Patrolman, developed emotional stress/PTSD, loss of sleep, anxiety and nightmares after upset family members “circled” him while he was making an arrest.
- The WCLJ stated that the claimant's testimony and the IME findings correlated: the claimant had served as a marine in the Middle East and had made 800 arrests as a police officer and had never had any treatment for psychological counseling or a psychiatric condition until the instant claimant. Only then did he establish the claim for PTSD.
- The claimant's reliance on [WCL Section 10\(3\)\(b\)](#) is misplaced, as that statute requires, as a threshold matter, “extraordinary” work-related stress and an “emergency.” **The events of this case do not meet this standard as they involved a relatively routine incident, in which the claimant was never threatened with imminent harm.** Contrary to the claimant's testimony, the video shows that the family members did not approach the claimant and did not taunt the claimant.
  - Employer: City of Schenectady; 2022 WL 5621898 (N.Y.Work.Comp.Bd.)



## New York – Extraordinary Stress (Prior)



- § 10. Liability for compensation
  - (3)(b) Where a police officer or firefighter subject to [section thirty](#) of this article, or emergency medical technician, paramedic, or other person certified to provide medical care in emergencies, or emergency dispatcher files a claim for mental injury premised upon extraordinary work-related stress incurred in a work-related emergency, the board may not disallow the claim, upon a factual finding that the stress was not greater than that which usually occurs in the normal work environment.



## New York – Extraordinary Stress (New)

§ 10. Liability for compensation

(3)(b): Where a [~~worker~~] police officer or firefighter subject to section thirty of this article, or emergency medical technician, paramedic, or other person certified to provide medical care in emergencies, or emergency dispatcher files a claim for mental injury premised upon extraordinary work-related stress incurred [~~at work~~] in a work-related emergency, the board may not disallow the claim upon a factual finding that the stress was not greater than that which usually occurs in the normal work environment.



## New York – Extraordinary Stress (New)

### § 10. Liability for compensation

(3)(c): The board may not disallow a claim by a **covered employee** upon a factual finding that the stress was not greater than that which usually occurs in the normal work environment where a claim for **post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), acute stress disorder or major depressive disorder** resulting from work-related stress is filed upon submission of medical evidence .... Such covered employee must demonstrate that such disorder arose out of **extraordinary work-related stress** attributable to a **distinct work-related event** or events directly related to the employment and occurring during the performance of the employee's job duties.

(3)(d): Nothing in paragraphs (b) and (c) of this subdivision shall apply to a claim for mental injury due to a work-related physical injury.



## Suicide



While it is clear that the deaths from suicide is not compensable if it has been solely caused by the deceased workers willful intent to kill him or herself, it can be compensable when it is caused by the worker's insanity, brain derangement or pattern of mental deterioration when that is caused by a work related injury. [\*Matter of Delacruz v. Inc. Village of Freeport\*, 175 A.D.3d 1739 \(2019\).](#) lv. den [35 N.Y.3d 902 \(2020\).](#)





# Crisis Preparation



Equip employees with tools to handle crisis situations  
Importance of preparedness in reducing stress during emergencies



# Managing Extraordinary Exposures



- Compassionate Leadership
- Critical Incident Debriefing
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
- Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
  - Counseling
  - Support services



# Treating Extraordinary Exposures



- Psychoeducation and normalization
- Peer to peer, self-help
- Avoid social isolation
- **SLEEP Skills**
  - Sleep hygiene
  - CBT-insomnia
  - Medication

## Take Aways

- According to the Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation studies...
  - Public Safety Officers are more likely to initially be diagnosed with psychological injuries rather than musculoskeletal injuries.
  - Public Safety Officers were slower to experience full recovery in the year after rehabilitation.
  - In fact, most Public Safety Officers did NOT return to work in full after Post Traumatic Stress rehabilitation.

Gross, D.P., Rachor, G.S., Yamamoto, S.S. *et al.* Characteristics and Prognostic Factors for Return to Work in Public Safety Personnel with Work-Related Posttraumatic Stress Injury Undergoing Rehabilitation. *J Occup Rehabil* **31**, 768–784 (2021)



Key  
Takeaways

## Take Aways

- The Legal Landscape is Shifting...
- How are you adapting?



Key  
Takeaways





# Questions and requests for additional information



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